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ABSTRACT

The principal's role in the reading program is examined in this paper, and a reading inservice program for principals is described. The first section shows how a school superintendent became aware of the need for principals to take an active role in their schools' reading programs, cites literature that notes the importance of the principal's role, and discusses the kinds of knowledge about reading instruction that principals need. The second section discusses the development of the inservice program and describes the following steps of the program: administration of a survey of principals' attitudes about their role in the reading program; presentation of a speech on the topic of principals and reading; development of individual reading philosophies by principals and their staffs; presentation of inservice programs by publishing company consultants; presentation of a final inservice workshop; and evaluation of the program by principals. An appendix includes copies of the survey and evaluation forms given to principals, letters sent to principals and to publishing company consultants, and a copy of the program for the final inservice workshop. (GW)

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# THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN THE READING PROGRAM

E. B. Fech

B. J. Micetich

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E.B. Fech

B.J. Micetich

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND THE ERIC SYSTEM CONTRACTORS."

Presentation at the International Reading Association
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May 5, 1977



CS004038

## PRINCIPAL AND THE READING PROGRAM, I

Madeline Hunter, writing in the November/December 1975 issue of National Elementary Principal, says, "In educational accomplishment, reading maintains the position as one of the most critical indicators of success. We can argue whether or not this should be so, but the fact remains that it is so." The truth of Hunter's statement led to this paper.

In order to come to some understanding of how and why we developed a reading inservice model for principals, some background is necessary.

The particular model Ms. Micetich is going to describe was developed for a system comprised of 41 elementary schools and 5 secondary schools spread out over 10 counties. Each of these schools has a great deal of autonomy. As judged by standardized test scores, the schools were doing pretty well in reading so most would assume that instruction was adequate. There is always room for improvement, but overall we were under no pressure to do anything in particular about reading.

Several circumstances combined to bring about a realization that we couldn't be satisfied with where we were because we still had too many students who were not reading, or whose reading needs were apparently not being met.

One of the circumstances that aroused my interest in the subject was attendance at a reading conference in the summer of 1975. One of the things stressed was the importance of supporting the reading program. As principal of an inner-city school, I had given the necessary material support but I had never made a serious effort to learn much about the reading process, what constitutes an effective reading program, or what approaches are used in the teaching of reading, or anything else about reading. Providing money was sufficient.

So, when I was invited to attend a workshop at which some of these topics would be addressed, I welcomed the opportunity.

Hugh Schoephoerster, one of the featured speakers at the conference, made a great impact and gradually there came a realization that much work had to be done

if the goal of having every child learn how to read was to be achieved.

The remainder of the summer and much time since then was spent in learning about reading. By fall, a determination had been made that the only way to find out what was going on in reading was to visit classrooms.

Some don't think that superintendents ought to be doing that sort of thing, but I decided that 2 days a week would be spent in the classroom. During the 1975-76 school year, more than 400 classrooms at both the elementary and secondary level were visited. Reading lessons were observed in every school.

Some of the things observed were, at least in my mind, questionable at best, appalling at worst. I saw entire reading lessons devoted to purple papers. No reading was being done by anyone. I saw schools in which individual teachers had been allowed to select their own reading materials with no thought to the scope and sequence of skills--using Ginn 360 in the first two grades, something else in 3 and 4, and still something else in grades 5 and 6. Nothing had been done to see that a scope of skills was completed for each child.

One school had not started using a new reading series even though it was the first of October because they were not able to get consultant services from the publisher and the staff was unwilling or unable to begin until they were inserviced.

Reading instruction that didn't seem to be going anywhere was observed. Teachers seemed to be doing things off the tops of their heads and there was no way you could judge what the purpose of instruction was--where they had been or where they were going.

Not all was bad, however. From a limited knowledge of what constitutes good reading instruction, some really good things were observed. In many of the classrooms there was a high interest in reading with lots of interaction between teacher and student and most importantly, with a lot of reading going on.

My concern was not with the good teachers but with those who obviously needed help or a lot of kids were not going to learn how to read well, if they learned how to read at all.

I have a firm conviction that the key to the success of a school and any program within that school is the principal. Unfortunately there are too many persons in that position who do not have adequate pre-service training or for whom inservice is not provided.

A decision was made that something had to be done to make principals aware of their indispensable role in the reading program. To make sure we were on solid ground in approaching the problem through the principals instead of directly through the teachers, as is often the practice, a search of the literature was made to see what others were saying. There was sufficient support to proceed because many people were saying essentially the same things. Let me illustrate with a few quotations, some of which you are probably familiar with.

Albert J. Harris in Reading Improvement, Spring 1976, says, "The school principal exerts a powerful influence on the success or failure of a school's reading program, according to the limited available evidence." He cites several studies to support this and then lists seven things the principal must do. First on his list is that the "Principal should be well informed about reading instruction."

Wayne Otto and Laurence Erickson in an IRA publication of 1973 titled Inservice Education to Improve Reading Instruction write, "The principal's responsibility for the reading program entails knowledge of what constitutes an effective reading program; it includes the ability to provide competent supervision; and it implies that the principal has more than a superficial knowledge of the skills to be taught, the sequence from level to level, the ways which teachers can diagnose and adjust individual differences, and the effectiveness of the total program."

Admittedly, that is a tall order, but it is a must if the reading program is to be successful, teachers are going to get the assistance they need, and kids are going to learn how to read and enjoy doing it.

From the above premise, Otto and Erickson go on to say, "The principal who accepts this responsibility takes the following actions: 1) builds a background of understanding about what constitutes a good reading program for the school, and, if weaknesses in his knowledge exist, seeks to increase his understanding of reading."

Four other actions are given which relate to taking necessary action, using his authority to help improve the program, being actively involved, involving teachers.

The important point for our purposes was Number 1--improving knowledge of reading.

There are principals who know almost nothing of the teaching of reading and don't care to do anything about this lack of knowledge. Some are more comfortable counting lunch money or engaging in other clerical duties than sitting in on a first grade reading lesson, or trying to help a new teacher get off to a good start. (I know because I once worked for one.)

A book which has proved itself most useful in filling the knowledge gap, and which is recommended for all administrators, is Administrators and Reading. It's a 1972 IRA publication. In one article, Paul Avery lists four functions teachers expect principals to carry out: 1) to try to improve the quality of reading instruction in the classroom; 2) to establish an attitude and atmosphere which enhances the reading program; 3) to provide optimum conditions to assist each child to learn to read; 4) to budget sufficient funds to implement an effective reading program.

In that article, Avery quotes two other persons and what they say bears consideration.

S. Allen Cohen, in the January 1969 Phi Delta Kappan, blamed administrators for poor reading in the classroom, citing a lack of knowledge of how to help improve

reading instruction or an unwillingness to act when he or she knows poor instruction is going on. Certainly the latter is more blameworthy.

I recommend the article be read in its entirety.

The second reference was to Dr. Walter McHugh speaking at a pre-convention institute of the IRA 10 years ago. McHugh believes that the most important factor in improving the reading program in the classroom is training principals to be instructional leaders in reading.

Lucille Strain, in "Accountability in Reading Instruction," says, "Administrators have a responsibility to give priority to facilitating the teachers' work. It seems to me that in order to facilitate it effectively, principals must have some knowledge of what reading instruction is all about."

Note how often the notion of knowledge comes up. Principals must have knowledge about reading and if they don't have it, someone has to see that they get it. That's the district's responsibility--the superintendents and the boards--supervisors--principals--reading specialists--should insist on it.

What kinds of knowledge should they have? One, they need to know something about learning theory. Two, they should know something about the reading process, about the different approaches to the teaching of reading. Three, they should have some knowledge about placement and about reading disabilities, about diagnosis and remediation, and the assessment of reading competence. Certainly he or she ought to know the philosophy of the reading program being used in his or her district or school.

All of this may sound like an attempt to make a reading teacher out of the principal. It's not. But reading is the most important subject we teach, especially at the primary levels, so it would seem if the principal is to become knowledgeable in any curriculum area, this ought to be the one.

Having explored the literature for support of getting to the observed problem through the principal, the next concern was trying to find out what principals

did or did not know about reading. It was felt that somewhere there must be a suitable instrument which could be used as a pre-test to determine the extent of principals' knowledge and where there were gaps that needed to be filled. Unfortunately, we were unable to find anything that suited our purpose. Nevertheless, a decision to go ahead with plans for an inservice program was made. Overall, the results were positive from the reception by the principals. A lot was demanded of them and only time will tell whether the effort will produce the results sought. There will be a follow-up.

Incidentally, we are working on the development of an instrument which will measure in some way the things we believe principals ought to know. With or without such a test, the program developed will at least raise the awareness level of the building administrator so that he or she begins to realize the impact to be made on the reading program in the individual building. To do this they will have to take our recommendations seriously and will have to become actively involved in the reading program.

Among the reactions we did receive from principals as they moved into certain phases of the inservice program, was that they and their staff became aware that regardless of their reading scores on standardized tests, they did have some problems in looking at the overall reading program which they were not aware of. Barbara Micetich will tell you a little more about that.

For the remainder of the session, she will outline the model inservice program developed and will provide a rationale for each of the four parts of the program.

## PRINCIPAL AND THE READING PROGRAM, II

Over these past few years with Houghton Mifflin Company mainly as a reading consultant, I've been made aware of the positive or negative influence a principal can have on a reading program, both before the program gets going and after it is installed.

I've noted and often wondered that relatively few school districts ask for or set up inservices for principals when a new reading program is adopted. I'm speaking of inservice by a district consultant or resource person who knows the program, or by the publisher's consultant whose job it is to know the program or programs.

When this is not done, the principals are not aware of the philosophy and strategies of the program or programs. Of course, there is still a chance for them to get this information. Of the literally hundreds of initial inservices I've done for teachers and that other consultants have done, it is unusual for principals to attend the entire session.

I know there is a terrible demand on a principal's time but then I am also aware that

1) his or her non-presence may be interpreted as lack of interest;

2) he or she is missing an easy way to:

   a) find out about the reading program;

   b) find out some of the concerns of the teachers regarding reading.

So as Mr. Fech and I discussed what we had witnessed and what we were reading, I was very interested in helping him develop a first-year model for providing inservice for his principals.

In developing our model we had read and I had heard repeatedly that teachers who taught reading wanted these from their principals:

1) guidance;

2) encouragement;

3) inservice training

4) time for planning

5) relief from some of the obstacles which inhibit reading instruction.

Teachers felt they could have these expectations because, as Mr. Fech cited before, the administrators have the authority within the building. Teachers also believe that administrators then have an obligation to exercise that power to:

1) improve quality of reading instruction;
2) encourage attitudes and provide an atmosphere to enhance the reading program;
3) provide optimum conditions;
4) budget sufficient funds for an effective reading program.*

Even though we planned to concentrate our inservice effort with the principals, we were always aware of these needs articulated by teachers.

After many meetings and much discussion, we set the following general working objectives for the inservice we would provide:

1) TO MAKE THESE PRINCIPALS MORE AWARE OF THEIR IMPORTANT AND UNIQUE ROLE IN HAVING AN EFFECTIVE READING PROGRAM:

   We felt this awareness, either a first-time awareness or a rekindled awareness, would encourage the principals to see that <u>they could</u>.

2) TO HELP PRINCIPALS DEFINE THEIR ROLE IN VIEW OF LIMITATIONS OF TIME AND THE SETTING OF PRIORITIES.

   Here we hoped to help bring the principals to the point where they would have to decide how they could best:

   A) Improve the quality of <u>reading instruction</u>
   B) Provide an atmosphere to enhance their reading programs
   C) Provide the best conditions
   D) Budget sufficiently for a more effective reading program

* Carlson, Thorsten R., ed. <u>Administrators and Reading</u>: "Obligations of School Administrators to the Reading Program" by Paul J. Avery.

In setting up our model program of inservice we intended to follow the proven steps to any successful inservice: *

1) Assessment of situation to be improved;

2) Planning carefully for the inservice;

3) Implementation of the inservice;

4) Evaluation by those who gave the inservice and by the participants;

5) Follow-up if necessary.

The program we finally decided on would be carried out over a six to seven month period, beginning September, 1976 and ending March, 1977.

Even though articles in the various journals told us something of how principals saw themselves in relation to their reading programs, we needed to know what this group of principals thought of as their role in the reading program in their schools.

Since, as Mr. Fech previously pointed out, we could not find the attitudinal assessment we want ed and since we were being pressed for time, we administered a very simple survey to all principals before the inservice sessions began. Each principal was asked to describe in writing his/her role. (See copy of survey in Appendix)

STEP 1: (Sept.) 1976

High on almost everyone's response sheet was the purchase and provision of materials. This responsibility was keenly felt. Very few listed encouragement, support, monitoring of present programs, in-classroom observations. Only one principal stated that the principal should be sure teachers have necessary inservice and training to teach the reading program.

This simple assessment told us we were on the right track with the two major objectives we had set out to accomplish.

*Source: T. Fitzgerald 1975 New York State Education Department

STEP II: (Oct.) 1976 The next step was to have a knowledgeable and inspirational speaker on the topic: "Principals and Reading." A major speaker was needed who would not hedge on important issues and who could fire these principals up to examine:

1) their roles in the reading program; and

2) their reading programs.

We asked Dr. Hugh Schoephoerster because we had both heard him speak and we were certain that his emphasis was what we needed.

An inspirational beginning seems important to any long-term program. A group needs the soul-searching, the impetus, the initial enthusiasm such a beginning provides. This thrust will help carry the participants through the later sessions and focus their attention. So often enthusiasm wilts or dies after the beginning because of a lack of follow-up or follow-through. We did not intend to let that happen.

The session which lasted a full day was taped so that it would be available to the principals as a reference and for us to be able to recall the main thrusts of the speaker.

Among the many points our speaker made, these stood out in our conversations with principals afterwards:

1) Even though you purchase a reading curriculum, <u>you</u> must have a <u>reading philosophy</u>;

2) Many schools manage reading programs so poorly that the don't know:

   A) if everything necessary is being taught;

   B) if what is being taught is being learned (poor or no monitoring and record keeping).

3) Organizational patterns and procedures of a reading program <u>cannot</u> be purchased.

These comments and the principals' reactions guided us in our refining the next steps in the program.

STEP III: (Nov.) 1976 Step 3 was an official request to each principal from the superintendent to get together with his/her staff and to find out what their reading philosophy was. Once discovered, this philosophy was to be sent to the superintendent. (See request in Appendix)

As an added incentive to get these philosophies returned by the deadline, they were to be typed up and bound in folders. These folders would be given to each principal at the February session.

This was not just another exercise but a focusing of principals' attention on their beliefs and those of their staffs about reading.

STEP IV: (Dec.) 1976 Because of Mr. Fech's in-school observations, the stress of the main speaker on monitoring, and my own experiences, inservice of the principals by the publishing companies' consultants was the next step.

Each consultant was contacted by letter from the superintendent's office. The letter stated the specific points to be addressed in these sessions. (See copy of letter in Appendix)

It is important that a consultant's expertise be directed to the specific needs of the group.

These sessions were held on different days rather than simultaneously so that any principal might attend more than one.

Principals did attend as many sessions as his or her school had programs; some attended extra sessions to inform themselves about other reading programs, especially those few who had discovered in the process of writing a reading philosophy, that their programs did not match their school's philosophy.

Later we learned that some principals, following these sessions, called on the publisher's consultants to work with their individual staffs. Evidently they hadn't realized until now that their staffs needed this type of inservice.

STEP V: (Feb.) 1977 The next phase of inservice Mr. Fech and I chose to do ourselves. We could then design each part to benefit this group of principals. We planned and executed a full day's inservice, alternating the sessions.

e.g. Mr. Fech did a session on Principal as Instructional Leader, stressing that this was really what his district principals should be. With this emphasis he tied the present inservice back to the main speaker's theme also.

I did a session on "The Art of Instruction."

We also role-played a demonstration observation of a classroom reading lesson and follow-up conference.

Other sessions dealt with creating optimum conditions within a school for an effective reading program and, of course, judgments in budgeting sufficient funds. (See program in appendix)

The emphasis here was definitely that principals should go back and start doing things to improve their school's reading program.

STEP VI: (March) 1977 The final step in this program was to ask the principals to evaluate each phase.

The request for evaluation and a simple rating sheet for each portion of the inservice went out from the main office. (See copy in Appendix) Each rating sheet also had room for comments.

Many stated that they had become aware of "gaps" in their knowledge and a need to take very seriously their importance in a reading program.

Some stated plans for the coming year.

Some suggested next year's sessions.

Many felt a need to meet as a group specifically discussing reading and sharing various activities and ideas tried in other schools.

There were also criticisms of the length of some of the sessions.

The evaluations pointed out the way to go with next year's follow-up or follow-through sessions. We both knew that even though we've had a very good beginning inservice must be going on.

The evaluations and attitudes and actions of principals made us certain we had accomplished our first objective:

TO MAKE THESE PRINCIPALS MORE AWARE OF THEIR IMPORTANT AND UNIQUE ROLE IN HAVING AN EFFECTIVE READING PROGRAM:

and that we had a good start on the second.

TO HELP PRINCIPALS DEFINE THEIR ROLE IN VIEW OF LIMITATIONS OF TIME AND THE SETTING OF PRIORITIES.

Because of the simplicity and the adaptability of our mode we thought it worthwhile sharing. Two of its strong features are:

1) It is made up of components or modules that can be re-ordered and re-arranged to meet a district's specific needs.

2) It can be done in a limited and realistic amount of time.

## APPENDIX

I. Initial survey handed out to principals before inservice program began.

II. Mr. Fech's letter requesting schools' reading philosophies be written.

III. Copy of letter that went to four different textbook companies' educational consultants.

IV. Copy of program for Step V.

V. Sample of final evaluation.

Office of Catholic Education, Diocese of Lansing

311 SEYMOUR AVENUE • LANSING, MICHIGAN 48933

October 13, 1976

MEMO TO: Principals

FROM: Edward B. Fech

In order to help us help you, we need to collect some information related to our inservice program this year. Before today's activities begin, please take a few minutes to respond to the question below. Your cooperation is appreciated.

Briefly describe your role, as principal, in the implementation of the reading program in your school. In other words, what do you personally do with respect to the teaching of reading.

Office of Catholic Education, Diocese of Lansing
311 SEYMOUR AVENUE • LANSING, MICHIGAN 48933

October 26, 1976

MEMO TO: Elementary Principals

FROM: Edward B. Fech

RE: A Reading Inservice and School Reading Philosophy

The first of our three reading inservice programs for principals has been completed. No doubt there was a lot to be digested and a long day like that can be tiring, but I do hope it was profitable for you.

The next two sessions will follow a different format and the December one will run just about two hours. More details will be made available to you at a later date.

One of the things that seems obvious from Dr. Shoephoerster's talks is that either the school or the school system must have an articulated philosophy of reading to guide the staff in the implementation of a failure-proof reading program. You already have a philosophy whether you think so or not. What you are currently doing is a reflection of what you believe about the teaching of reading.

Before the next inservice you and your staff are asked to commit that philosophy to writing. This is to be submitted to me no later than December 1. To make your task easier, I am enclosing a couple of sample philosophies for your guidance. Your cooperation in this matter is most appreciated.

I am also enclosing a summary of recent research on the teaching of reading. It would be well to make copies available for all teachers.

Too often pertinent research is avoided as being too difficult to understand, perhaps more difficult to apply to the day-by-day activities of teaching, yet we are foolish if we do not attempt to understand what the research tells us so that we may be better able to teach boys and girls.

The burden of proof that they know better is on those who choose to denigrate the usefulness of research. If they can, let them show other research or conduct their own to refute the position. It is unprofessional to merely take a stand on the basis of intuition or experience for that is no proof at all.

I recommend that you and your staff set some time aside to study this paper and see how your program fits into what research tells us.

I am extremely pleased by the fine spirit being exhibited by the principals and their willingness to give so much time and effort, as well as financial support, to their own professional growth. All in all, it shows a real dedication to doing what is best for the boys and girls entrusted to our care. I firmly believe that, as long as we keep their welfare foremost in our own minds, we cannot help but come out ahead.

I do want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your cooperation. My prayers and best wishes are extended to you for a good year.

Remember, the Diocesan office is in business to serve you but we cannot do this unless you express your needs to us.

Looking forward to seeing you again at the next principals' meeting.

EBF/eo
Enc.

Office of Catholic Education, Diocese of Lansing

311 SEYMOUR AVENUE • LANSING, MICHIGAN 48933

September 30, 1976

Ms. Peggy Dion, Consultant
Houghton-Mifflin Company
19939 Lichfield
Detroit, Michigan 48221

Dear Ms. Dion:

I am pleased that you will be doing the inservice for principals of schools using the Houghton-Mifflin reading program. You are scheduled to meet with them on December 9, 1976, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. at St. Therese School in Lansing.

I know the time allotment is relatively short for the material I want covered but I feel confident you will be able to do the job.

To reaffirm my concerns as expressed in our telephone conversation, I want the following topics addressed:

--What is the philosophy of the program; that is, what do the authors believe about the teaching of reading? What is their approach?

--What is the decoding system used in the primary levels?

--How is vocabulary developed at the intermediate levels?

--Is it a continuous progress or levels program? If so, what is meant by levels? What is the management system? Record-keping, testing, scope, sequence, etc.? How does the principal know the rate at which skills are being mastered at each level? How does the principal monitor the program?

--What kind of help for the teaching of lessons is given in the teacher's manual? Please take the principals through a typical lesson.

As I said, I know I have asked for a lot in a short amount of time but I think the items are essential if principals are going to assume their rightful role as instructional leaders.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. I'm looking forward to seeing you again.

Sincerely,

Edward B. Fech
Superintendent of Education

EBF/eo

# READING INSERVICE FOR PRINCIPALS

FEBRUARY 11, 1977

St. Therese School (North Rooms 2 & 4)
2620 N. Turner Street, Lansing
9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

| | |
|---|---|
| 9:00 a.m. | THE PRINCIPAL AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER<br>*Bruce Fech* |
| 9:30 a.m. | THE ART OF INSTRUCTION<br>*Barbara J. Micetich* |
| 10:00 a.m. | Coffee Break |
| 10:15 a.m. | OBSERVATION: WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN AN *EFFECTIVE* READING LESSON<br>(a demonstration)<br>*Barbara J. Micetich*<br>*Bruce Fech* |
| | D i s c u s s i o n |
| 12:00 | L U N C H (provided at St. Therese) |
| 1:00 p.m. | PRINCIPALS ARE THE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL READING PROGRAM (discussion) |
| 1:45 p.m. | PROVIDING OPTIMUM CONDITIONS AND INSERVICE FOR A SUCCESSFUL READING PROGRA<br>*Barbara J. Micetich* |
| 2:30 p.m. | BUDGETING SUFFICIENT FUNDS FOR A SUCCESSFUL READING PROGRAM<br>*Bruce Fech* |
| 2:45 p.m. | Wrap-up Session |

**EXPLORING**

**and**

**Discovering**

***new*** **Reading Perspectives**

## Final Evaluation

TO: Principals

FROM: EBF

RE: Reading Inservice for Principals, Diocese of Lansing, 1976-77

There were four parts to the Reading Inservice Program for Principals. In order to help us determine the value of each to you and to your school, please fill out a separate rating sheet for each part. In case you've forgotten, the four parts were:

Dr. Hugh Schoephoerster, Oct. 13

Writing of School Reading Philosophy

Sessions with Publishing Company Consultants

Bruce Fech and Barbara J. Micetich, Feb. 11

Please return all sheets to me by March 1, 1977. This is most important and your cooperation will be appreciated.

Identify the session and vote on a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 being MOST USEFUL.

Title_____

1. Did you receive something immediately useful in your work.

   1 - 2 - 3 - 4

2. Did you receive something useful in planning for future work?

   1 - 2 - 3 - 4

3. Did you get ideas that strengthened or challenged your philosophy?

   1 - 2 - 3 - 4

4. Was the presentation made in appropriate, interesting ways?

   1 - 2 - 3 - 4

5. Would you recommend this type of inservice, covering another subject area, next year?

   1 - 2 - 3 - 4

What suggestions would you have for making this particular session more valuable to you?

What suggestions would you have for making inservice programs more valuable to you?

Other comments?